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ABSTRACT

Defining agenda-setting as the ability of the mass media to influence the level of the public's awareness and perceptions of political issues, a study was conducted to examine the agenda-setting power of the black periodical press in the United States. Survey responses collected by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies were analyzed to determine respondents' assessments of the most salient issues for black Americans. The media agenda was determined by analyzing 441 front-cover articles of political issues from the black magazines "Ebony," "Black Enterprise," and "Essence," from 1974 to 1982. The data indicated significant differences between blacks and whites regarding which political issues were most important. Blacks mentioned social welfare issues more often, while whites most often mentioned economics and business issues as being most important. The content analysis demonstrated that the black periodical press set the agenda of salient issues for black adults between 1978 and 1980. This limited support of the agenda-setting influence suggests that media power is conditioned by one of three conditions: (1) issue salience for black adults is internal, and therefore is consistent over time; (2) the black periodical press often is out of touch with its readers, as shown by the variance of the media agenda during the years of the study; or (3) black adults turn to other media or nonmedia sources for guidance in their perceptions of the "issues of the day," as shown by the independence from black media of issue salience for black adults. (HTH)

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A Test of the Agenda - Setting Power
of the Black Periodical Press:

1974 - 1982

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A Test of the Agenda-Setting power
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Agenda-setting is the ability of the mass media to influence the level of the public's awareness about political issues. This capacity of the media to "structure the unseen environment of symbols" (McCombs and Shaw, 1976) has received much scholarly attention. Lang and Lang (1966) stated that the "media force attention to certain issues by constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals should think about, know about and have feelings about" (p. 466). And, Cohen (1963) has analyzed the media's "great capacity to tell people what to think about" (p. 120).

Not only does the public learn about a given issue through the media, say McCombs and Shaw (1972), but news media, by consensus, also detail how much importance the public should ascribe to that issue. The development of this detail centers on the amount of content, and from the position, or prominence of display, of coverage of an issue. The selection of news stories from the total number of events in the environment therefore not only provides greater opportunity for exposure to those events actually covered but also for the consequent influence of such coverage on the media audience.

The present study examines the agenda-setting power of the Black periodical press in the United States. The research measures the similarity of rankings of salient issues between Black magazines and the rankings of issues of Black Americans over time. The hypothesis is that longitudinal analysis will

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show that the Black periodical press determines the perceptions of issue salience of Black adults over time. The purpose of the research is to determine whether the Black periodical press serves to set the public agenda for its readers. The research question is:

Does the Black periodical press set the agenda for its readers?

I. Statement of the Problem

In previous attempts to validate the hypothesis of agenda-setting, researchers consistently have conceptualized the media agenda to include only the "elite media," including the major daily newspapers and the network news programs, or those media directed to the widest local audiences, such as television newscasts and local newspapers. In addition, these researchers have identified only an aggregate public agenda, showing little regard to research findings which indicate that perceptions of salient issues differ significantly by race.

Because the Black presence in America as reflected in the mass media has been found inadequate (Nelson-Ricks, 1984; Jet, 1983; Kotz, 1979), a number of recent research studies have focused on the Black-owned communications media (Ammons, Dimmick and Pillota, 1982; Gibbons and Ulloth, 1982; Monroe-Scott, 1979). Researchers have focused their studies on differences in content between the Black-owned and White newspapers (Ammons et al., 1982; Gibbons and Ulloth, 1982), and on the content of the Black

newspaper itself to determine what information the medium offers its readers (Poindexter and Stroman, 1982; Seeman, 1971). As results of these investigations, several scholars and observers of Black-owned newspapers have suggested that the Black newspapers serve to promote issues of importance to Black consumers (Templeton, 1983; Higgins, 1980; Walker, 1978). Others have stated that the medium's focus is "one of advocacy [for civil rights] where informal segregations remains the norm" (Templeton, p. 38).

But the literature reveals two areas neglected by scholars who have tried to determine the role Black newspapers play in the lives of their readers. First, any analysis of the Black newspaper must be considered a local study, since there are no Black newspapers circulated nationally. At best, a study based on Black-owned newspapers reflects regional trends, and, given the nature of these newspapers (Ammons, et al., 1982; Poindexter and Stroman, 1980; Seeman, 1971), must be urban in orientation.

In addition, for the 40 percent of Blacks who live in rural areas, there are few opportunities to read a current Black newspaper. As Sharon (1974) observed, "Black-owned newspapers are unlikely to be available to Blacks living outside of the nation's metropolitan areas" (p. 615).

Specifically, the study tests the proposition that Black magazines set the agenda of public issues for Black Americans. The study is important because it examines the effect of the selection and presentation of media content: it is designed to determine whether the media agenda establishes the agenda of salient political issues for the future leadership of Black

America.

II. Review of Relevant Literature

Consistent results supporting the agenda-setting effect have been found regarding the amount of news exposure (Weaver, Graber, McCombs and Eyal, 1981; Chaffee and Wilson, 1977; McClure and Patterson, 1976.; Weaver, Auh, Stehls and Wilhoit, 1975). Audience "need for orientation" was found positively related to the strength of the agenda-setting influence (Weaver et al., 1981, Weaver et al., 1975).

However, the literature reveals that even for news issues which logically could be considered especially pertinent to Black Americans, Black media users and their press have been ignored. For example, in Winter and Eyal's (1981) examination of the hypothesis for the civil rights issue, they determined the placement of the issue on the public agenda by using the responses from 27 Gallup polls conducted between 1954 and 1976, and the media agenda was determined by the number of front-page stories on civil rights in the New York Times in each of the six months prior to each poll.

As there was no civil rights category in the Index, the researchers coded "all 'civil rights' stories contained under the 'Negro' and 'Education' categories" (p. 379). In justifying their selection of the newspaper, the authors argue that "it is the elite newspaper. It is assumed that the non-prestige press gives comparative coverage to important issues. Front-page coverage in the Times meant prominent coverage in every other newspaper in America" (Ibid.). Such an assertion obviously fails

to take Black-owned newspapers into account. One could argue that it would have been instructive in this context for the researchers to control for the race of the poll respondents, as well as including Black-owned media in their analyses, in order to generalize their results to persons for whom civil rights was a highly salient news issue during these years.

Researchers who have examined media usage indicate that Blacks read major newspapers less often than Whites (Graber, 1980; Strosen and Becker, 1978; Sharon, 1974), and that these patterns also are reflected for national magazines (Sharon, 1974; Block, 1970; and Greenberg and Dervin, 1970). One might expect that urban Black newspaper readership of major dailies is low when compared to that of Whites because of the opportunity Blacks have to read Black newspapers in most urban areas: Lyle's (1975) research of Blacks' media use has shown that urban Blacks are the focus of these studies, and it further has been shown that Blacks consider Black print media more reliable than major daily newspapers as sources of news and information about themselves (Gibbons and Ullioth, 1982). In fact, the logical assumption that alternative print media may supplement, or entirely supplant, daily newspapers and White-owned magazines in the lives of Blacks is supported in the media use literature (Nelson-Ricks, 1984; Durand, Teel and Bearden, 1979; Allen and Bielby, 1979; Tan, 1978).

Such research has demonstrated, therefore, that in order to identify the roles media may play in the lives of Blacks, one should analyze Black media. The survey of prior research has

shown that Blacks are underrepresented and misrepresented in their coverage and portrayals in the mass media. In fact, given their attitudes about the fairness and accuracy of the mass media (Mayfield, 1984; Brown, 1982; Chandler, 1982) it may be argued that Blacks "distrust" the mass press more than Whites (Cannon, 1983).

Therefore, because the literature indicated that, indeed, the Black press provided the appropriate channel for the study of the agenda-setting influence of media, another decision for the present research had to be made regarding the most appropriate medium in that channel: newspapers or magazines. And although most scholarly research of Black-owned communications media reflect the long and important history of the Black newspaper (Daniel, 1982), there is another component of the Black press which serves Black America, and which meet the constitutive criteria of Black ownership, management and audience. Both consumer magazines, and those issued by fraternal and religious organizations, are distributed to millions of readers each year. The significant impact of these periodicals has been neglected in scholarly research. The evidence of the penetration and distribution of Black-owned magazines suggests that these media provide the most appropriate content available to determine the role print journalism plays in the lives of its readers.

Therefore, in a departure from prior studies, the Black periodical press was selected for analysis in the present agenda-setting research. Because the literature reveals that researchers whose definition of the "Black press" includes only newspapers, these results do not address the fact that no

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national edition of a Black newspaper exists. Unlike a number of major dailies, including the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal, there is no national edition of any Black newspaper. Therefore, the research which reports findings on the information in Black newspapers is based on local publications. At best, these findings may be generalized to articles of interest to readers in a particular region.

In addition, the present research reflects the trends in the characteristics of the Black adults Ebony's editors have called the "New Generation" (August, 1978). These magazines selected best may represent the primary Black medium for upwardly-mobile and upscale Blacks in America. While Black-owned newspapers target an older, more traditional segment of the Black population, these magazines are edited and published for younger, more highly-educated and affluent readership. These individuals may comprise the segment of Black America which is most directly responsible for gains in the political, economic and social areas of Black life.

Further, this study may reveal that by failing to consider race as a critical demographic predictor of "the most important problem facing America today," previous agenda-setting research has ignored evidence that Black and White adults hold dramatically different attitudes about the salience of various political issues of the day. For example, in Gallup's (1983) administration of the poll, significant differences were found between blacks and whites regarding the "most important problems" (pp. 4-5) in America. Blacks reported unemployment as most

important significantly more often than Whites. On the other hand, Gallup's White respondents were more likely than Blacks to report national defense issues as most important. In addition, Gallup has cited unemployment as highly salient for Blacks in a number of previous administrations of his poll (1982: 1979).

This concern among Blacks for the unemployment issue is not surprising, given the Rockefeller Foundation's (1984) Employment and Training Report to the President regarding unemployment among Black teenagers and adults. According to Dr. Bernard E. Anderson, director of the Foundation's Division of Social Science, "staggering increases" in Black unemployment were found between 1973 and 1981. Among Black teenagers, for example, unemployment increased by 26 percent during these years. For Black adults between 20 and 24 years, the increase was 70 percent. For Black adults between 25 and 34, unemployment increased 62 percent during these years.

Therefore, it is not surprising that a recent Gallup report, entitled "Racial Polarization Still Persists Despite Gains," the polling organization reported that "substantially fewer Blacks than Whites express satisfaction with their standard of living, income, housing and jobs" (p. 194). These results indicate that despite "marked gains, there still are two Americas -- one Black and one White" (*ibid.*). The most dramatic distinctions were observed in the economic dimensions of American life, with 65 percent of Whites reporting satisfaction with their family incomes, and only 43 percent of Blacks reporting satisfaction. Seventy-one percent of Whites and 55 percent of Blacks were content with their jobs. For Whites, 83 percent reported

satisfaction with their housing situations, while 70 percent of Blacks were satisfied. Finally, 80 percent of Whites and 65 percent of Blacks reported satisfaction with their standard of living. These criticisms of scholars, pollsters and Black religious, political and economic leaders, together with indications that two societies, based on race, exist in America, would be even more important were only the major media available for American Blacks.

However, Black-owned media offer their audiences more diversity of coverage, and these media also enjoy wide distribution in Black homes. Of the nearly 20 periodicals dedicated to the interests of Blacks in America, three magazines represent the media of America's Black "intellectual elite" (Radushen, Hower and Tichy, 1972). One of the publications, Ebony Magazine, has demonstrated a long history of success among the Black middle-class. The two newer periodicals, Black Enterprise and Essence: The Magazine for Today's Black Women, are media for younger, highly educated and upwardly-mobile Black adults. Each of these magazines may be considered a successful enterprise in Black publishing: all three were included in the most recent listing of the leading Black companies in America (Black Enterprise, June, 1985).

Given the results of the preceding literature review, the present research tested the following hypotheses:

- H-1: There are significant differences between the public agendas of Blacks and Whites.
- H-2: The correlation between the media agenda at

Time 1 and the public agenda among Blacks at Time 2 will be greater than the correlation between the public agenda among Blacks at Time 1 and the media agenda at Time 2.

III. Method

Both surveys and content analysis were used to determine whether coverage of political issues in Black magazine journalism sets the agenda of salient issues for the Black public in America. The surveys measured respondents' assessments of the most salient issues for Black Americans. The content analysis measured the frequency of coverage for political issues in Black magazines. By correlating the press emphasis of political issues, demonstrated by the prominence and predominance of news topics, and comparing their rankings to the public's emphasis of these issues as identified in the surveys, the research addresses a recurring issue in mass communication literature: the potential of the media to influence the formation of public opinion.

The present research analyzed survey responses collected by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies (CPS). The American National Election Study is conducted biennially, and is supported by the National Science Foundation, the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. Data are obtained from personal face-to-face interviews with national probability samples of all citizens 18 years of age and older. The sample responds to open-ended questions (Miller, Miller and Kline, 1975 - 1983).

The present research analyzed survey responses collected by CPS to the following question:

"What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?"

Five sets of rankings (1974, 1976, 1978, 1980 and 1982) were analyzed for each of 11 mutually exclusive categories of issues. They were:

- 1) social welfare issues;
- 2) agriculture-related issues;
- 3) natural resource issues;
- 4) labor problems;
- 5) racial issues;
- 6) public order issues;
- 7) economics and business issues;
- 8) consumer protection issues;
- 9) foreign affairs issues;
- 10) national defense issues; and
- 11) issues relating to the functioning of the federal government.

In addition, two categories of race (Black and White), gender (female and male) and annual household income (less than \$15,000 and \$15,000 and more) were used to test the hypothesis of differences between the racial groups regarding their respective public agendas.

Because the survey data were similar to U.S. Bureau of the Census reports for Black adults in the population and income and gender distributions, the respondents in the American National Election Study samples are representative of Black American

adults over 18 years of age.

Because Click and Baird (1983) report that important content is presented on the covers of magazines, the media agenda was determined by counting the frequency of major political articles featured on the covers of Ebony, Black Enterprise and Essence for the nine months before the Center for Political Studies data were collected. The time frames for the content analysis were February, 1974 through October, 1974 for the American National Election Study conducted from November 5, 1974 through January 31, 1975, and the nine months prior to the data collected of each subsequent American National Election Study through 1982. Topics of articles were coded in one of the 11 mutually exclusive categories used by respondents in the American National Election Studies. Six graduate students volunteered to undergo training for three hours, and to serve as coders for reliability of a sample of magazine cover articles about the 11 categories of content measures. Intercoder reliability was measured at 0.88.

A total of 441 front-cover articles of political issues were presented in the magazines biennially between 1974 and 1982, and were included in the analysis. Table III-1 presents the distribution of political issues presented in these articles. Though a narrow range of political issues were presented in the magazines, the table shows that most political issues were presented in Black Enterprise (44 percent). This is not surprising, given the magazine's economic editorial focus. Articles in Ebony represented 38.1 percent of the sample, and Essence published 17.9 percent.

(TABLE III-1 ABOUT HERE)

Table III-1 reveals a wider range of political issues on the Black Enterprise media agenda than is evident on the other magazines' agenda. This is not surprising, either, because Click (1975) found that Ebony tends to cover a large number of entertainment and sports topics and personalities. Further, Simpson reported that together with political coverage, Essence covers the beauty and fashion aspects of Black women's lives, also. Nonetheless, the Spearman correlations among the three magazines were statistically significant, with an average correlation of 0.76 ($p = 0.01$). Therefore, the media agenda index constructed by combining the coverage of all of the magazines represented a reliable measure of the frequency of coverage of political issues in the Black periodical press.

Several statistical procedures were completed to test the two hypotheses. First, because of the probability of small cell sizes, the Likelihood Chi square ratio was used to test for significant differences between Black and White adults' perceptions of political issue salience. To identify further the hypothesized differences between the public agendas, the two groups of respondents, the rankings of the issues on the two agendas were compared for significant differences using Spearman's test for rank-ordered data.

To test the second hypothesis, cross-lagged correlation technique was used to determine the direction of any influence between the media and the public. Measurements of both the media agenda and the public agenda among Blacks were calculated for two

time periods over the five data sets. The hypothesis of agenda-setting therefore would be supported if results demonstrated a higher correlation between the media agenda at Time 1 and the public agenda among Blacks at Time 2 than between the media agenda at Time 2 and the public agenda among Blacks at Time 1 for one or more of the four time blocks.

Figure III-1 describes the anticipated relationships of variables pertinent to the study.

(FIGURE III-1 ABOUT HERE)

IV RESULTS

1. Trends in Differences Between the Public Agendas of Blacks and Whites

These data support the notion that, as was suggested in the Kerner Commission's (1968) report, there are two societies in America -- one White and one Black." The evidence indicates that Blacks and Whites differ significantly in their respective perceptions of the relative salience of the political issues of the 1970s and 1980s.

The analysis demonstrated significant differences between Blacks and Whites regarding the relative proportions of each racial group who perceive certain political issues as most important. Table IV-1 presents the mean proportions of adults in the Center for Political Studies' American National Election Study samples who reported political issues as "most important." They show that Blacks mentioned social welfare issues most often,

and Whites most often mentioned economics and business issues as most important.

(TABLE IV-1 ABOUT HERE)

Table IV-1 shows that while Blacks in the samples mentioned social welfare issues only slightly more frequently than economics and business issues (35.62 percent and 35.13 percent, respectively), a significantly greater proportion of Whites in the samples mentioned economics and business issues as "most important" more frequently than social welfare issues (44.45 percent and 21.15 percent). Foreign affairs issues ranked third for each racial group, with Blacks and Whites mentioning these issues with similar frequencies (11.83 percent and 11.30 percent, respectively). Indeed, variation in Blacks' perceptions of the salience of social welfare issues did appear to be conditioned by variations in the rates of Black unemployment.

For the years under consideration, Blacks ranked public order problems fourth most important, and consumer protection issues fifth (5.62 percent and 5.42 percent, respectively). The remaining issues represented salient national problems to fewer than five percent of the total sample of Blacks.

Whites in the American National Election Study samples ranked consumer protection issues fourth (8.15 percent); no other issues were mentioned by at least five percent of the Whites in the samples.

Therefore, this overall analysis demonstrates empirical support for Hypothesis One. Significant differences were observed between the public agendas of Black and White adults between 1974 and 1982. Not only are these results an intriguing reflection of the

disproportionate impact on Blacks of the nation's economic recession that began in 1974 and continued through 1982, but the data also indicate the influence of societal economic conditions on Blacks' public opinion about the salient issues of the day. According to Mathey and Johnson (1983), the nation's economic condition "effectively brought to a halt the momentum of [Blacks'] overall social and economic improvement apparent at the beginning of the decade" (p. 10). These results indeed do appear to demonstrate empirically that Black adults considered their personal economic situations at least as important as the conditions in the nation as a whole, while Whites were more concerned about more traditional economic issues.

The results of the comparisons of the rankings of salient issues by Blacks and Whites are presented in Table IV-2 as Spearman rank-order correlations (rhos) for each of the years of the study. Again, these data support Hypothesis One. The public agendas of the two groups generally are not correlated, or correlate negatively, between 1974 and 1982 as required to support Hypothesis One.

(TABLE IV-2 ABOUT HERE)

Further, Table IV-2 illustrates that no statistically significant positive Spearman rank-order correlations were found between the public agendas of all Blacks and Whites in the American National Election Study samples. The data therefore indicate that Blacks and Whites held very different notions about the important issues of the day between 1974 and 1982.

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2. The Media Agenda Emphasized by the Black Periodical Press

Table IV-3 shows that front-cover articles in the Black periodical press most often covered stories about social welfare issues (36.05 percent) and economics and business issues (34.69 percent). Other front-cover articles which received at least five percent of the coverage of salient political issues included racial issues and foreign affairs issues (9.3 percent each).

(TABLE IV-3 ABOUT HERE.)

When examined by each year in the study, the content analysis demonstrates several trends which may have influenced the public agenda of Black Americans over time. For example, in 1974, nearly half of the front-cover articles were stories about social welfare issues (48.84 percent). Further, nearly half of the remaining stories examined economics and business issues (24.42 percent). Racial articles represented 11.63 percent of the front-cover articles about salient political issues in 1974.

Between February, 1976 and October, 1976, and before the 1976 Presidential election, different patterns were found. For instance, most of the front-cover articles during this period examined economics and business issues (37.36 percent), and fewer than one-third represented social welfare issues. Further, the results demonstrated an emphasis on foreign affairs issues: these represented 15.38 percent of all articles.

Table IV-3 shows that economics and business articles again most often were emphasized before the 1978 Congressional

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elections (40 percent), although only slightly more so than social welfare issues (34.74 percent). And, as was the case before the 1976 Presidential election, foreign affairs issues represented the next highest category (14.74 percent).

A somewhat larger proportional difference between economics and business and social welfare issues was observed before the 1980 Presidential elections than had been found in prior years. For 1980, the difference between these issues, which ranked first and second on the media agenda of salient issues was 12.09 percent; for the two prior years, the differences were 7.69 percent and 11.43 percent, respectively. As was the case before the 1974 Congressional elections, the content analysis demonstrated an emphasis on racial issues. These front-cover articles represented 12.09 percent of the salient political issues.

The 1974 results were replicated in front-cover articles examined before the 1982 Congressional elections. Social welfare issues ranked first and represented 39.74 percent of these articles. Economics and business issues ranked second with 29.49 percent of the article topics.

3. Agenda-Setting

by the Black Periodical Press

The literature indicates the hypothesis of agenda-setting is tested most appropriately by comparing correlations between media agendas and public agendas over time. The results of these comparisons for this study, presented in Figure IV-1, revealed

that the hypothesis of agenda-setting by the press was supported between 1978 and 1980.

(FIGURE IV-1 ABOUT HERE.)

Figure IV-1 first demonstrates high lagged autocorrelations between the media agendas between 1974 and 1982. In addition, consensus was found among Black adults regarding their perceptions of the most salient issues, as the data also showed high lagged autocorrelations for the public agendas. Also, high synchronous correlations were observed between the media agendas and the public agendas between 1974 and 1982. These results indicate that both the Black periodical press and Black adults vary little in their respective and joint perceptions of political issues salient to Black Americans.

Consensus Within Media and Public Agendas: 1974 - 1982

The analysis showed that the Black periodical press emphasized similar issues between 1974 and 1982. Figure IV-1 illustrates an average Spearman rank order lagged autocorrelation of 0.89 for the salient media issues. Issues were ranked most similarly between 1978 and 1980 ($\rho = 0.96$), and most differently between 1976 and 1978 ($\rho = 0.85$).

Slightly less consensus was found among Black adults in the samples regarding their rankings of the "most important" political issues during these years. The average Spearman rank order lagged autocorrelation among the public agendas among Black adults was 0.79. Issues on the public agenda between 1978 and 1980 were ranked most similarly ($\rho = 0.88$), and were ranked

most differently between 1976 and 1978 ($\rho = 0.69$).

The average agreement between the media agenda and the public agenda was 0.64. Specifically, the synchronous correlations ranged from 0.42 in 1976 to 0.80 in 1978.

Results of Cross-Lagged Operations

As previously stated, Figure IV-1 demonstrates support for the agenda-setting hypothesis between 1978 and 1980. The lagged correlation between the media agenda of salient issues in 1978 and the public agenda in 1980 ($\rho = 0.79$) was greater than the lagged correlation between the public agenda in 1980 and the media agenda in 1978 ($\rho = 0.60$). Therefore, the longitudinal analysis did indicate that the presentation of political issues by the Black periodical press, together with the predominant coverage accorded certain issues in these media, did serve to set the agenda of salient issues for Black adults.

The limited support for the agenda-setting hypothesis logically can be accounted for, especially when one considers the economic climates which faced Black adults during the eight-year period of the study. These results suggest that when Black adults were responding to environmental situations outside the influence of media, such as harsh economic realities, Blacks did not look to the Black press to "tell them what to think about." Rather, the findings indicate that during these periods, Black adults were involved highly with maintaining social, political and economic gains made previously. The partial support for the hypothesis of agenda-setting indicates that, as the literature suggests is the case with the "elite" media and their influence

on aggregate public agendas, the Black periodical press is most effective in telling Black adults "what to think about" when external, environmental situations are not pervasive in the lives of Black adults.

V. Conclusions

The longitudinal design provided considerably more information than cross-sectional findings would have allowed. The data showed empirically that the agenda of salient issues for Black adults differed significantly from the public agenda of Whites over time. The hypothesis that the Black periodical press sets this agenda of salient issues for Black adults was supported between 1978 and 1980.

Empirical support for Hypothesis I indicates that Black and White adults hold significantly different perceptions of important issues in their respective societies, even after the massive integration efforts during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This result, found consistently over time, is a telling indication of the sociology that comprises the so-called "Black experience" and the "White experience" in America. The finding suggest that the Black adult's perspective of social, political and economic issues is a racial view, and is one that transcends income and gender differences.

It is telling because many Blacks and Whites believed that the concept of 'America-as-one-society' would become a reality after Blacks' educational and income advances from the Civil Rights Movement. The academic, corporate and government Affirmative Action programs, for example, offered the "New

Generation" of Blacks sanctioned entrance into recognized, predominantly White institutions of higher education, management career tracks, and public sector appointments. However, this research has shown that a so-called Black "perspective" of important issues does remain even for the career-oriented, highly educated and upwardly mobile Blacks who have even wider exposure than other Blacks to the perceptions of the dominant culture in America. The findings indicate that the Black periodical press exerts "considerable influence" on the political judgements of Black adults.

However, limited support of the agenda-setting influence of the Black periodical press suggest that media power is conditioned by one of three situations. First, issue salience for Black adults is internal, and therefore is consistent over time for Black America. Second, because the media agenda of political issues varies greatly during the years of the study, the Black periodical press often is out of touch with its readers. Third, because it has been demonstrated that issue salience of Black adults is independent of coverage in Black media, Black adults turned to other media and non-media sources for guidance in their perceptions of the "issues of the day," including other Blacks, and the major metropolitan newspapers, news magazines (such as Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report), and the major television networks for guidance in their perceptions of the "issues of the day."

The first of these suggestions, that salient priorities of Black adults are internal, was not supported by these analyses.

Were this the case, Blacks' issue salience should have been consistent during periods when the Black periodical press is not influential. It was demonstrated that the public agenda of issue salience, particularly for Blacks' perceptions of the relative salience of social welfare and economics and business issues, was not completely stable over time. The Spearman rank-order autocorrelations between the public agenda were statistically significant. Often, however, public agendas were more closely ranked for the time blocks when the Black periodical press was not influential in establishing the public agendas for Black adults than for the time block when the media did set the agenda.

Neither was the second possibility, that the media agenda varied greatly between the time blocks, supported by the analyses. Again, high autocorrelations were found in the media agendas. For these data, the autocorrelations between the media agendas of political issues did not differ significantly between the time blocks when the press effectively set the public agenda among Blacks, and when it did not.

The third possibility, that Black adults use other media and non-media sources to establish issue salience, well may be the case. There is support in the literature that, together with media, conversations between individuals, or "talk content" (Shon, 1978) influence both public agendas and media agendas. And while there has been some scholarly concern during the last decade with the particular dialects of so-called "Black English" (See Dillard, 1977), no studies have been conducted to determine the "what" of conversations among Blacks. Also, although the penetration of America's major press in Black households is

significantly less than penetration in White households, it well may be that, during periods when Black magazine journalism does not effectively establish issue salience among Black adults, these adults may be responding to either the external economic situations outside their control. These adults also may be responding to a "media mix," including not only Black-owned magazines, but urban Black newspapers, radio, television and cable outlets, also, as well as white print and public affairs media.

As is the case with nearly all agenda-setting studies to date, the content analysis was based on the media likely to be available to survey respondents. It would be interesting to examine other populations, such as the subscribers and other readers of these publications, together with other Black-owned media, including urban newspapers, and broadcasting and cable stations, to determine the extent to which the results presented here, regarding issue salience among Black adults, and political coverage in media, would be replicated.

It also should be noted that these analyses were based on two-year time blocks. It is likely that greater generalizability of the results would be achieved if the time frame of the study were shorter. For a further examination of the Black periodical press, for example, a researcher logically could construct a design to address the monthly distribution of these media more appropriately. In addition, the parent company of Ebony Magazine, Johnson Publishing Company, also owns and circulates Jet to a national Black audience. This weekly periodical also

could be examined for its influence in establishing the priorities of Black adults. In this way, trends in coverage of political issues could be analyzed in more timely fashion than every two years.

Nonetheless, there are two areas of research that may benefit from these results. The first of these areas is agenda-setting research itself. This study has demonstrated that the notion of an "aggregate public" is not appropriate for generalizing results to Blacks in America. Because significant differences between the agendas of Blacks and Whites were observed over time, scholars who examine agenda-setting should be sensitive to their biases toward determining public agendas from the responses of survey samples that are composed primarily of Whites.

These findings have shown that racial differences generally determine issue salience. Neither the aggregate public nor its agenda were observed in the American National Election Study samples. It is suggested that future tests of the agenda-setting hypothesis examine identifiable segments of the public because it has been shown that the public agendas of Blacks and Whites are not the same. It would be interesting to determine whether there is a relationship between the agenda of Black adults and the major press in America. These data have shown that issue salience for Black and White adults is not similar.

In addition, this study has shown that only a few issues, such as social welfare, economics and business, and foreign affairs issues consistently are salient. Therefore, future research which examines these salient issues primarily could

result in greater support for the media's agenda-setting influence in determining public opinion.

The other area of research that could benefit from these results includes the investigations of content in Black-owned media. It was demonstrated that the agenda of political issues covered in Black magazine journalism consists of four core issues: between 1974 and 1982, these were social welfare, economics and business, racial problems and foreign affairs issues. It would be interesting for researchers to examine the presentation of these issues in the Black periodical press, together with other Black-owned media, as well as to identify the orientation, or "perspective," of the media coverage of these issues. By comparing results of these analyses with manifest content of political coverage in other media, scholars may be able to determine how Black-owned media differs from other media regarding the "perspective" of the Black press.

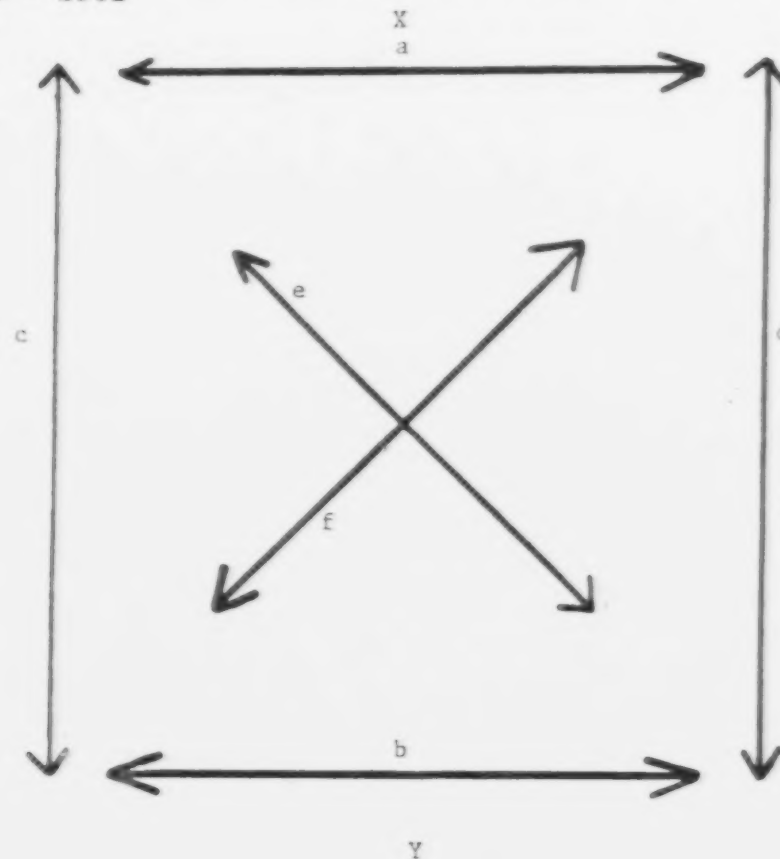
However, because the research represented a sociological perspective of political communication, the results demonstrated at least one role Black-owned media play in the lives of their audiences. In addition to serving as the "voice" for expressing Black public opinion, the evidence substantiated the proposition that the Black periodical press also can contribute to the formation of that opinion.

Table III-1: Presentation of Political Issues in the Black Periodical Press
By Issue and Magazine

<u>Political Issue</u>	<u>Magazine</u>		
	<u>Black Enterprise</u> (n=194)	<u>Ebony</u> (n=168)	<u>Essence</u> (n=79)
Social Welfare	15.46 %	47.02 %	63.29 %
Agriculture	0.52	0.60	0.00
Natural Resources	2.06	0.00	0.00
Labor Problems	0.00	0.00	0.00
Racial Problems	9.28	13.69	0.00
Public Order Issues	2.58	4.17	5.06
Economics and Business	56.19	22.02	8.86
Consumer Protection	2.06	0.00	0.00
Foreign Affairs	2.58	10.71	22.78
National Defense	0.00	0.00	0.00
Government Functions	9.28	1.79	0.00
Percent of Total Articles	44 %	38.1 %	17.9 %

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Figure III-1: Expected Relationships: Spearman Rank-Order Cross-Lagged, Synchronous and Auto Correlations Between Media Agendas and Public Agendas, 1974 - 1982



Where:

X = Agenda of Political Issues in Black Magazines

Y = Public Agenda of Salient Issues among Blacks

a = lagged autocorrelation between media agenda at Time 1 and Time 2

b = lagged autocorrelation between public agenda among Blacks at Time 1 and Time 2

c = synchronous correlation between media agenda and public agenda among Blacks at Time 1

d = synchronous correlation between media agenda and public agenda among Blacks at Time 2

e = cross-lagged correlation between media agenda at Time 1 and public agenda among Blacks at Time 2

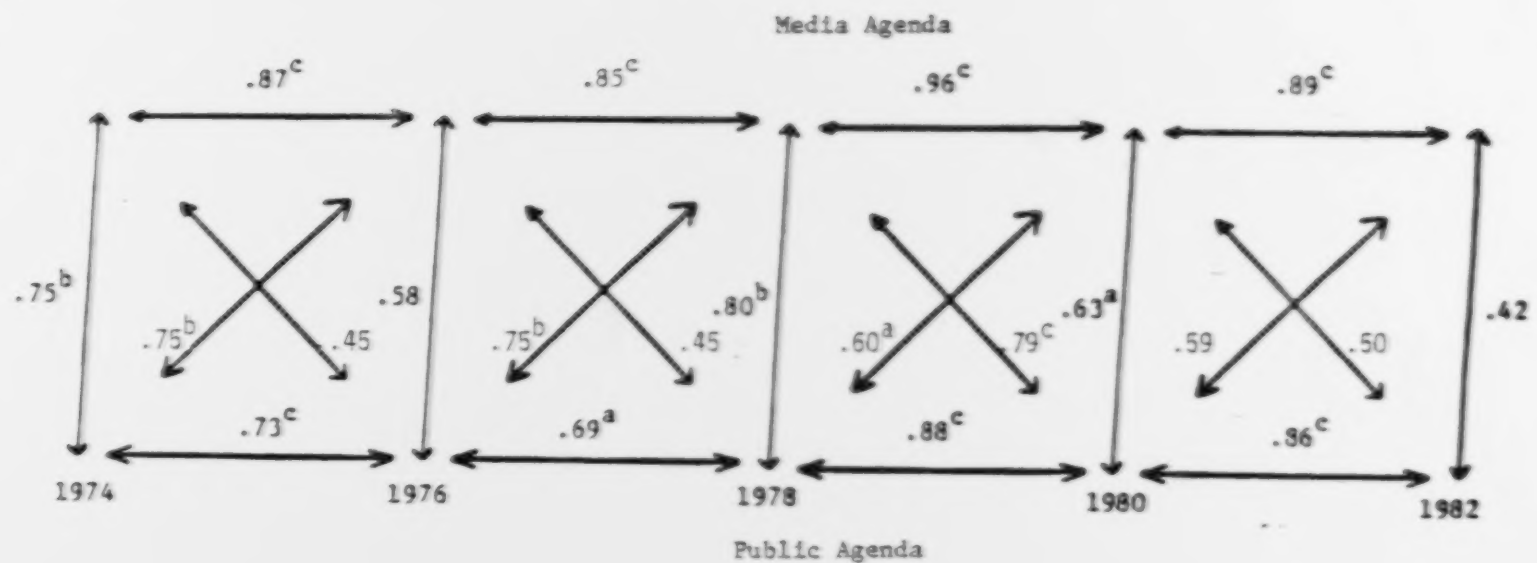
f = cross-lagged correlation between media agenda at Time 2 and public agenda among Blacks at Time 1.

Table IV-1: Mean Percentages and Ranks of Issue Salience:
 "Most Important Problems" Cited by Race, 1974 - 1982

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Race</u>	
	<u>Blacks</u> (n=864)	<u>Whites</u> (n=8110)
Social Welfare *	35.62 % (1)	21.15 % (2)
Agriculture	0.72	1.03
Natural Resources	0.26	1.17
Labor Problems	0.13	0.37
Racial Problems	1.12	0.45
Public Order Issues	5.62 (4)	3.89
Economics and Business *	35.13 (2)	44.45 (1)
Consumer Protection	5.42	8.15 (4)
Foreign Affairs	11.83 (3)	11.30 (3)
National Defense	1.75	4.58
Government Functions	2.37	3.46

Chi Square = 162.57
 df = 10
 p = 0.0001

Figure IV-1: Spearman Rank-Order Synchronous and Autocorrelations Between Media Agendas and Public Agendas, 1974 - 1982



a: $p = 0.05$
b: $p = 0.01$
c: $p = 0.001$

Table IV-2: Spearman Rank-Order Correlations Between Public Agendas Of Blacks and Whites, Controlling for Income and Gender, 1974 - 1982

Respondent Groups.

	<u>Year</u>				
	<u>1974</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1982</u>
Blacks/Whites	.09	-.03	.21	-.30	-.25
Low Income: Blacks/Whites	-.39	-.08	-.10	-.53	-.09
High Income: Blacks/Whites	.11	-.57	-.49	-.85 (a)	-.41
Women: Blacks/Whites	.00	-.56	-.06	-.46	.06
Men: Blacks/Whites	-.30	-.26	-.24	-.59	-.30

a: $p = 0.05$

Table IV-3: The Media Agenda of Political Issues

<u>Political Issues</u>	<u>Year</u>					<u>Mean</u> (n=441)
	<u>1974</u> (n=86)	<u>1976</u> (n=91)	<u>1978</u> (n=95)	<u>1980</u> (n=91)	<u>1982</u> (n=78)	
Social Welfare	48.84%	29.67%	34.74%	28.57%	39.74%	36.31%
Agriculture	1.16	0.00	1.05	0.00	0.00	0.44
Natural Resources	2.33	2.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.91
Labor Problems	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Racial Problems	11.63	5.49	5.26	12.09	12.82	9.46
Public Order	4.65	4.40	2.11	2.20	5.13	3.69
Economics	24.42	37.36	40.00	40.66	29.49	34.39
Consumer Protection	0.00	1.10	0.00	0.00	3.85	0.99
Foreign Affairs	2.33	15.38	14.74	9.89	2.56	8.98
National Defense	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Government Issues	4.65	4.40	2.11	6.59	6.41	4.83

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